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SUBJECT: IVANOVO: UNITED RUSSIA FRACTURE LEADS TO EARLY
ELECTIONS

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) A simmering dispute in Ivanovo between a Kremlin-appointed Governor and a State Duma Deputy, over control of the local United Russia party and the economic benefits that go with it, reached a boiling point in December 2007 when more than half of the members of the regional Duma resigned in protest. The mass resignation led the Governor to dissolve the Duma and call for early elections on March 2, the same day as Russia's presidential elections, with the likely outcome more ruling party in-fighting. Opposition parties Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (SPS) are not taking part in the elections but the Communist Party, also in a weak position, was energized by the upcoming visit of Communist Party leader and presidential candidate Gennadiy Zyuganov. Ivanovo's new status as a ruling party stronghold was evidenced, during Emboff's February 12-13 visit, by the absolute lack of excitement surrounding the presidential race, with a large majority of local residents prepared to vote for Putin's pick, Medvedev. As the textile industry fades, Ivanovo seeks to be a major part of Golden Ring tourism. End Summary.

GOVERNOR AND STATE DUMA DEPUTY FIGHT FOR CONTROL

2. (SBU) A situation that Yabloko Party Deputy Chairman Aleksandr Rumyantsev described as "ripening for a year," reached a boiling point in December 2007 when 28 members of the Ivanovo Regional Duma resigned. Most of the deputies who resigned were members of United Russia and loyal to Governor Mikhail Men. Governor Men, a former deputy to Moscow Mayor Luzhkov, was appointed by the Kremlin to become Ivanovo's governor in December 2005, and replaced Tikhonov, a member of the Communist Party. Governor Men had previously been a member of the liberal opposition party Yabloko. His entrance onto the scene in Ivanovo caused tension with Ivanovo's State Duma Deputy Mikhail Babich as the two fought for control over the local United Russia party and over their economic interests in the region. The dispute played out in the Regional Duma where the members of United Russia split into two camps -- one loyal to the Governor and the other loyal to its Speaker, Andrey Nazarov, who is closely associated with Babich.

3. (SBU) The 28 deputies who resigned were mostly members of United Russia, however the group also included members of SPS, the Liberal Democratic Party and Just Russia. All were known to be dissatisfied with Nazarov, who local journalist Irina Mamayeva told us was a retired colonel who ran the Duma in a "very authoritarian way." Of the 48-member Duma, 33 were United Russia party members. The mass resignation gave Governor Men the opportunity to dissolve the Duma and call for early elections on March 2. The dissolution was challenged in court by a supporter of the Duma's speaker. On

February 13, the Supreme Court upheld the dissolution of the Ivanovo Duma.

14. (SBU) While ascribing different motives to the Duma protagonists, local interlocutors from a range of political parties told Emboff, during a February 12-13 visit to Ivanovo, the Duma had ceased to function prior to its dissolution. Yabloko's Rummyantsev explained that the Duma crisis was all about in-fighting among members of United Russia. He predicted that the new election will not solve anything because United Russia's party list contains members from both sides of the dispute -- including Nazarov. The Ivanovo Political Council, the decision-making body of the local United Russia party split into two factions with each faction sending their list of candidates for the upcoming election to the party's Federal Council. The Federal Council, rather than siding with either faction, merely merged the two lists. Communist Party leader and regional Duma Deputy Anatoliy Gordiyenko noted ironically that "the idea to dissolve the Duma was born in the United Russia Party and now the same people are running and it is expensive." Rummyantsev also accused United Russia of putting candidates on their party list who have agreed to step aside and sell their Duma seats to others.

YABLOKO AND SPS CANNOT AFFORD TO RUN

15. (SBU) Despite regional Duma and presidential elections that were due to take place in just over two weeks, there was little evidence of any campaigning taking place in Ivanovo. No billboard advertisements were evident, with the exception of those placed by the election commission informing voters of the date of the elections. There were no signs for local

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or presidential candidates. Everyone we spoke to agreed that presidential candidate Medvedev would do well in the region.

16. (SBU) Opposition parties Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (SPS) will not take part in the regional Duma elections. Despite the likelihood of achieving the percentage of votes necessary to enter the Duma (four percent under local law), neither party had the one million rubles required as a deposit to participate. According to Rummyantsev, the national party is unable to help even in a region where they could potentially succeed. Rummyantsev said opposition parties in Ivanovo are up against wide-spread use of administrative resources and pressure on the media to report favorably about United Russia and its candidates. "There is no independent source of information for voters," he said. "This lack of information is how you end up with results such as those in the December 2 State Duma elections."

COMMUNIST PARTY AWAITS ZYUGANOV VISIT

17. (SBU) The Communist Party has seen its influence wane from the days when the governor of Ivanovo was a "real" communist, Gordiyenko told us. The party's traditional voters, mostly older citizens living in rural areas, are increasingly supporting United Russia because of their dependence on state benefits. Today, Communist Party support comes largely from city dwellers. Gordiyenko told us there were "serious violations" in the Ivanovo region during the December 2 elections. He said most of these violations related to inappropriate use of administrative resources. He said the same is happening in the upcoming presidential elections, especially at the national level. Commenting on the amount of media coverage Medvedev is receiving, Gordiyenko said, "he (Medvedev) is everywhere. You plug in your iron, he is there. You look in the mirror to shave, he is there." He said that the more than 60 percent vote for United Russia in December would have been only 50 percent were it not for the

use of administrative resources.

¶18. (SBU) On February 16, Communist Party leader and presidential candidate Zyuganov was due to visit Ivanovo for the first time in seven years. Gordiyenko told us Ivanovo was one of only five regions Zyuganov would visit during the campaign. Noting that the party does better in neighboring regions, Gordiyenko said he was coming to visit a "weak part of the power chain." Subsequent news coverage of Zyuganov's visit reported that he received a tepid reception from local factory workers, only a few dozen of whom stayed past their shift to listen to him.

IVANOVO SEEKS TO JOIN 'GOLDEN RING' TOURISM BOOM

¶19. (SBU) Ivanovo is one of the poorest regions in Russia, with an average salary of 8 thousand rubles per month (320 USD). While local authorities, including Deputy Governor Zhukovskaya, said salaries are growing, others, including Yabloko's Rumyantsev said this is only due to increased salaries for local officials. The region, the historical center of Russia's domestic textile industry since Tsarist times and known as the "City of Brides," due to the

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large number of women who worked in the textile industry, is losing its struggle to compete with China and countries in South Asia. Deputy Governor Zhukovskaya told us Governor Men wants Ivanovo to become known as the "City of Investors." She told us the Governor had signed an agreement with five governors of other Golden Ring regions -- Yaroslavl, Moscow, Kostroma and Vladimir -- to advance tourism efforts and touted the city's new tourism facilities including a 10-room four-star hotel in the middle of the city.

¶10. (SBU) Journalist Mamayeva said Governor Men is viewed positively although "it is too early to talk about results." She noted that in the two years he has been in the job, there has been more investment in the region with new building construction and shopping centers. Nearly all interlocutors mentioned the upcoming opening of a national hyper-market as proof of Ivanovo's improved investment climate.

¶11. (SBU) There has been some evidence of work taking place under the National Projects although the Communist Party's Gordiyenko called the projects a "trick for the population." Most cited new medical equipment and ambulances and some increase in the availability of health care. There was also Internet access in schools. Work done in the agriculture sector under the National Projects was widely criticized. Others told us loans that are available under the program are

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either for too short a term to be beneficial for those who need them, or in other cases have been misdirected for such purposes as the purchase of dachas.

COMMENT

¶12. (SBU) There is little doubt that United Russia will do well in the region at both the national level -- supporting Medvedev for president -- and at the regional level where United Russia's party list and single mandate candidates will win an even greater number of seats. The larger question is whether or not the elections for the regional Duma will produce a result that resolves the power-struggle between the Governor and the State Duma Deputy. With candidates from both sides of the dispute poised to win seats in the next regional Duma, the end result may be more of the same.

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